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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000572

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DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/IPA, NEA/ARP, INL/G/TIP, AND PM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2014

TAGS: PREL BA

SUBJECT: FEISTY FOREIGN MINISTER FLAGS NECESSITY OF
CONSENSUS APPROACH TO ACHIEVE MIDDLE EAST PEACE TO NEA A/S
BURNS

REF: MANAMA (KING CABLE)

Classified By: CDA Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4(b)(d).

SUMMARY

1.(C) A feistier than usual Foreign Minister Shaikh Muhammad bin Mubarak Al Khalifa stressed on April 20 to NEA A/S Burns that the U.S. refashion consensus on the peace process. He very pointedly stated that the U.S. needs to package its initiatives better to glean greater Arab support for them. Embarrassing key Arab leaders like Mubarak and Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah can have implications beyond the peace process, like on Iraq policy. Shaikh Muhammad seemed optimistic that the Arab League Summit might be able to revive the Arab peace plan and issue a statement on regional reform. The Bahrainis would publicly endorse reform, he assured. On FTA-related bilateral issues, an uncomfortable Shaikh Muhammad pledged action on the Article 98 agreement "soon," assured A/S Burns of Bahrain's commitment to fight trafficking in persons, and promised to investigate a recent spike in Arab League Boycott clauses in GOB and parastatal contracts.

END SUMMARY.

U.S. NEEDS IMPROVED PEACE PROCESS PACKAGING

2.(C) A feistier than normal Foreign Minister emphasized to NEA A/S Burns that the U.S. needs to refashion consensus on the peace process in the wake of the President's announcement that he supports Prime Minister Sharon's Gaza withdrawal initiative. Shaikh Muhammad welcomed the news that the Secretary would meet in early May with the Quartet to reach

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consensus on incorporating the Gaza withdrawal into the roadmap and to start preparations on programming to help the Palestinian Authority take control of Gaza. He also was pleased by A/S Burns's assurance that we will need the U.N. and the World Bank to provide large scale assistance to the PA starting the day after it takes over authority in Gaza. The U.S. must rebuild the PA's capacity to govern and its ability to be a credible partner for peace. Bahrain, he stated emphatically, cannot make peace with Israel until the Palestinians do so.

3.(C) The Foreign Minister stressed that the U.S. needs to improve its packaging of the peace process. The President's endorsement of an Israeli plan at a time when the Israelis are assassinating Palestinian leaders only inflames Arabs against the U.S. Embarrassing Mubarak and surprising Crown Prince Abdullah doesn't build sympathy for the U.S. either. This has major implications for Arab support for the U.S. in Iraq and other issues, he underscored.

ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT LOOKAHEAD

4.(C) Shaikh Muhammad assured A/S Burns that Arab leaders are trying to resuscitate the Arab peace proposal for the Tunis Summit. However, he expected that the Shaikh Yassin and Rantissi killings will make it hard to gain consensus. Everyone, he noted, remembers the last time an Arab Summit presented a peace plan; Sharon attacked Jenin.

5.(C) Responding to A/S Burns's hope that the G-8 could issue a statement of support for Middle East reform echoing an Arab League statement, Shaikh Muhammad said that Bahrain agrees with the philosophy of a new Middle East. He affirmed that Bahrain would make a statement at the summit in support of reform. However, the Foreign Minister cautioned that the pace of reform will differ from country to country. He urged patience with Saudi Arabia. It's society is very different from the rest of the region, and the KSA is facing serious threats from internal terrorism.

BILATERAL ISSUES - ARTICLE 98, TIP, AND ARAB LEAGUE BOYCOTT

6.(C) Keying off Shaikh Muhammad's request that we conclude and bring into force the FTA by the end of this year, A/S Burns noted three outstanding bilateral issues that could have implications on congressional FTA approval -- the Article 98 Agreement, Trafficking in Persons, and the Arab

League Boycott. A/S Burns asked Shaikh Muhammad how quickly we could move forward on ratification of Article 98. Clearly uncomfortable, Shaikh Muhammad responded "soon." On trafficking in persons, A/S Burns emphasized that Congress is now demanding statistics on enforcement of anti-trafficking legislation, and he urged the Minister to provide as much information as possible about concrete actions like prosecutions and convictions of traffickers to the Embassy. Shaikh Muhammad responded that Bahrain is fully engaged on this issue, had just issued a brochure on worker rights to migrant workers in the Kingdom and was following up on other key actions. Surprised by the news about the increase in boycott requests from Bahraini entities, Shaikh Muhammad noted that Bahrain had changed its laws on the boycott years ago and promised to investigate the matter immediately.

COMMENT

7.(C) The Foreign Minister and the GOB want to help with the peace process and with the regional reform. Most Bahraini leaders believe that more freedom and increased economic activity within the region will produce more stability and security. However, Bahrain can't do much more than lead reform by example. Shaikh Muhammad was clear that it will not be a leader on the peace process; hence his encouragement to re-establish consensus among the major Arab leaders on the peace process and to increase U.N. and European activity.

8.(U) A/S Burns cleared this cable.
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